

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMCONSUL MEDAN

TO /AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 4136

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEDAN 0086

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PROP, ID

SUBJECT: ACEH RALLY CONDEMNS SEPARATISTS

1. AN ESTIMATED 20,000 PEOPLE GATHERED MARCH 6 AT SIGLI, ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF ACEH PROVINCE, TO CONDEMN ACTIVITIES OF THE ACEH INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT (NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT FOR ACEH SUMATRA -- NLFAS). EIGHT COMMUNITY LEADERS, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL POLITICAL FACTIONS AND THE MOSLEM CLERGY WERE PRESENT. PLACARDS CARRIED BY THE THROG ALLEGED THAT NLFAS HAD BEEN FORMED IN AN "INFIDEL COUNTRY" AND THAT NLFAS HAD HARMED THE PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOOD. ("INFIDEL COUNTRY" PRESEUMABLY MEANS THE U.S., SINCE DI TIRO, THE NLFAS LEADER, HAS SPENT SOME YEARS THERE, THOUGHT THERE WERE APPARENTLY NO ACCUSATIONS THAT NLFAS IS RECEIVING U.S. SUPPORT.)

2. PRESS ACCOUNT OF RALLY NOTES THAT "FOR SOME TIME NOW" VILLAGERS HAVE BEEN AFRAID TO ENTER FORESTS TO HARVEST RATTAN OR COLLECT WOOD OR EVEN TO WORK THEIR RICE FIELDS. STATEMENT ISSUED AT RALLY AFFIRMS PEOPLE'S SUPPORT FOR GOI, URGES ACEHNESE NOT TO SUPPORT NLFAS, ASKS THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE "IMMEDIATE STEPS" TO HALF REBEL DISTURBANCES AND APPEALS TO NLFAS MEMBERS TO SURRENDER, THREATENING THAT, IF

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SEPARATISTS MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REJOIN THE FOLD, THE PEOPLE "TOGETHER WITH THE ARMED FORCES" WILL UNDERTAKE OPERATIONS TO DESTROY THE NLFAS.

3. COMMENT: THIS RALLY, OBVIOUSLY STAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT, WAS HELD IN ONE OF THE TWO AREAS OF ACEH PROVINCE WHERE NLFAS ACTIVITY HAS BEEN MOST PROMINENT OVER THE LAST YEAR.

IT WAS AT THE VILLAGE OF LUENG PUTU NEAR SIGLI, IN FACT,
WHERE THE NLFAS' RED AND BLACK FLAG FOR INDEPENDENT
ACEH WAS FIRST DISPLAYED IN MAY 1977 AND WHERE NLFAS LEAFLETS
WERE REPORTEDLY FIRST SEIZED BY GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES.
EXCEPT FOR CURSORY REMARKS IN JUNE 1977 BY ACEH GOVERNOR WALAD
AND THE PROVINCE MILITARY COMMANDER, REMARKS WHICH DOWNPLAYED
ANY NLFAS THREAT, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE GOVERNMENT
HAS GONE PUBLIC WITH THE NLFAS PROBLEM, THEREBY ACKNOWLEDGING
THAT THE GOI IS TAKING IT MORE SERIOUSLY NOW. BY EMPHASIZING
THAT SEPARATIST ACTIVITY WILL IMPEDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
THE GOVERNMENT UNDOUBTEDLY HOPES TO COUNTER THE NLFAS'
PROPAGANDA WHICH STRESSES ACEH'S FAILURE TO RECEIVE MORE
DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND FROM
THE HUGE ARUN LNG PROJECT. THE PRESENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS
AT THE RALLY AND THE PHRASING OF THE STATEMENT IN RELIGIOUS
TERMS IS SINE QUA NON FOR OBTAINING THE SUPPORT OF ACEH'S
RIGOROUSLY CONSERVATIVE MOSLEM POPULATION.
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